

MARVEL
COMICS



X-MEN

SEP. '96 126

AVENGERS
IMPACT 2

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

SPECIAL
HEROES REBORN
UPDATE INSIDE!

X-FANTASY

THE BEAST OR
NOT THE
BEAST--

--THAT IS
THE QUESTION.

DIRECT EDITION



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\$1.95 US \$2.75 CAN

Stan Lee Presents
THE BEAST WITHIN

THE BRAND CORPORATION,
JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY.

MY NAME
IS FORGE.

BUILDING IS
WHAT I DO.

BUT SOMETIMES ONE
MUST FIRST DESTROY
BEFORE ONE CAN
CREATE.

CASE IN POINT, ANY
SHRED OF TRUST
MYSTIQUE AND
SABRETOOTH MAY
HAVE GIVEN ME.



MACKIE: STORY

TRIMPE: LAYOUTS

RAFFAELE: PENCILS MILGROM: INKS

RS/COMICRAFT: LETTERS

OLIVER: COLORS MALIBU: ENHANCEMENT

CORVESE: EDITOR HARRAS: CHIEF



HAD NO TIME FOR ARGUMENTS, OR FOR ASKING THEM TO VOLUNTARILY SWITCH THEIR RESTRAINING DEVICES BACK ONLINE.

PULLED TOGETHER WHAT I COULD FROM MCCOY'S LAB TO CREATE A MAKESHIFT DEVICE AND HIT THEM WHILE THEY WEREN'T AWARE.

THE HEADACHES WILL PASS.

IT'S NOT LIKE EITHER ONE OF THEM COULD BE ANGRIER ABOUT THEIR BEING FORCED TO WORK WITH X-FACTOR THAN THEY ARE ALREADY.

AND IT'S NOT LIKE I CARE. NOT WITH ALL THAT'S HAPPENED TODAY.

WE FAILED TO STOP THE SENTINEL LAUNCH.

WE'RE NOT GOING TO FAIL AT FINDING THE REAL HANK MCCOY -- ALIVE.

OUR BEST BET WILL BE TO SPLIT UP. WE'VE GOT TWO TRACKERS -- WE'LL USE THEM BOTH.

I'LL TAKE SABRETOOTH. WILDCCHILD WILL GO WITH MYSTIQUE.

POLARIS?

IT'S NOT LIKE I COULD DRAG HER AWAY FROM HERE NO MATTER WHAT WAS AT STAKE.

NOT WITH THEM HERE.

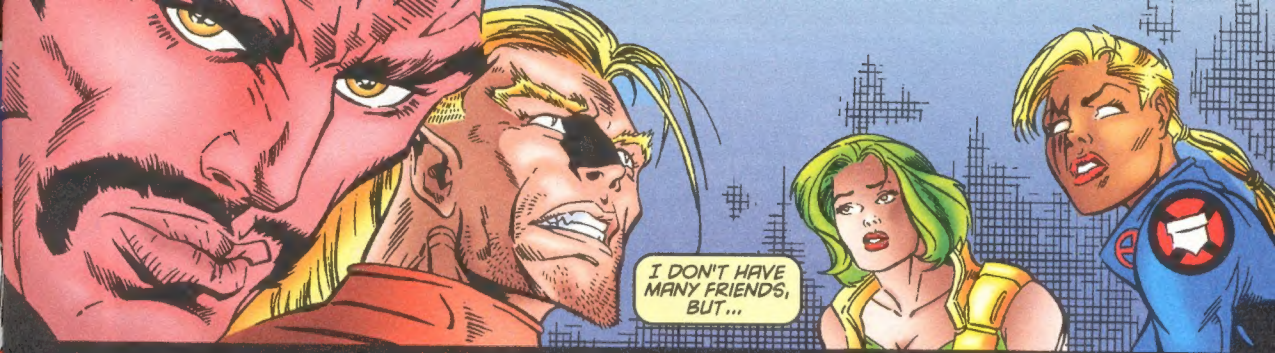
HAVOK AND RANDOM.

HAVOK WAS A MEMBER OF THIS MUTANT MILITIA FOR YEARS. HE AND POLARIS WERE LOVERS EVEN BEFORE THAT.

RANDOM THE MUTANT BOUNTY-HUNTER WORKED WITH US FROM TIME TO TIME, HE BONDED WITH POLARIS RIGHT AWAY.

BUT MCCOY GOT TO ALEX, HE'S OBVIOUSLY BEEN BRAINWASHED. RANDOM...?

SEEMS HE'S BEEN WORKING FOR MCCOY LONG BEFORE HE MET UP WITH X-FACTOR FOR THE FIRST TIME. BUT WHY IS STILL A MYSTERY.



I DON'T HAVE
MANY FRIENDS,
BUT ...



... ONCE I WOULD
HAVE COUNTED
ALEX SUMMERS
AMONGST THEM.

SO I CAN
IMAGINE
HOW LORNA
FEELS.

I COULDN'T
DRAG HER
AWAY FROM
HIM IF I
WANTED TO.

AND I
DON'T.



SHARD
WILL
STAY WITH
HER.

IF HAVOK AND RANDOM MANAGE
TO BREAK FREE OF THE MAKESHIFT
POWER-DAMPENING RESTRAINTS I
PULLED TOGETHER, POLARIS AND
SHARD ARE THE ONLY TWO OF US
WHO WOULD STAND ANY REAL
CHANCE OF TAKING THEM DOWN.

ALL AROUND THE
CHEMISTRY COULDN'T
BE MORE VOLATILE.



BUT LIKE
I SAID ...

... SOMETIMES
YOU HAVE TO
DESTROY
TO CREATE.



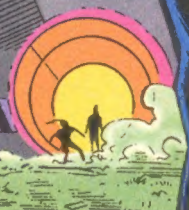
A LITTLE
CHANGE
OF LUCK
WOULDN'T
HURT.

MOMENTS
LATER...

LOOKS LIKE
IT'S JUST YOU,
ME AND THIS
GENE-TRASH.

Ooh!
SORRY, LORNA...
I... um... FORGOT
ABOUT YOU
AND HAVOK.

DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT IT,
SHARD.



RIGHT NOW -- OTHER
THAN BETRAYED --
I DON'T KNOW HOW
I FEEL ABOUT
EITHER OF
THEM.

I PROBABLY HAVE
NEVER BEEN CLOSER TO ANY
PEOPLE IN MY LIFE. WHAT
THEY DID TO ME IS...
OVERWHELMING.

SO I NEED
A FAVOR FROM
YOU.



IF THEY TRY
ANYTHING,
I WANT
YOU TO HIT
THEM.

HIT THEM
HARD. WITH
THE POWER THEY
EACH POSSESS
WE CAN'T AFFORD
TO GIVE THEM
ANOTHER
CHANCE.



I'M NOT
GOING TO HAVE
A PROBLEM WITH
THAT.

WHAT
ABOUT
YOU?



ME?



I DON'T
KNOW. I
JUST DON'T
KNOW.



KEEP WITHIN THE NETWORK
OF TUNNELS WHICH
HONEYCOMB THE ABANDONED
BRAND CORPORATION FACTORY.

NEVER
THOUGHT WE'D
BE WORKIN' THIS
CLOSELY AGAIN...
DID YOU,
MYSTIQUE?

WHAT I MISS
ABOUT THE TIMES
WE SPENT TOGETHER
IS ALL THOSE HOURS
OF JUST YOU AND ME
SHOOTING THE
BREEZE.

SO
HOW'S ABOUT
WE CATCH UP ON
OUR PERSONAL
LIVES?

MY HEAD IS
STILL SPLITTING
AND I'M IN NO
MOOD.

THAT'S WHAT
I LOVE ABOUT YOU.
THE WAY YOU GET THAT
WARM GLOW IN YOUR
EYES WHEN YOU JUST
WANNA SLIT MY
THROAT.

SHUT...
UP!

TELL ME...
HOW IS IT THAT A
BEAUTIFUL, BLUE-
SKINNED BABE LIKE YOUR-
SELF HAS NEVER SETTLED
DOWN? BET *YOU'D* MAKE
ONE FINE MOM,
MISTY.

YOU *DON'T* WANT
TO KNOW WHAT KIND
OF MOTHER I'D
MAKE.
OR
MAYBE YOU DO?

MAYBE
YOU'RE LONGING
FOR THE MOMMY YOU
NEVER KNEW. THE DADDY
WHO DISOWNED YOU.
IS THAT HOW
IT IS?

DID THEY
KICK YOU OUT... WHEN
THEY SAW THEIR LOVELY
BOY TURN INTO AN UGLY
MUTANT FREAK? DID YOU
KILL THEM? IS THAT IT,
WILD FREAK? DID YOU
EAT MOMMY AND
DADDY?

NO...
IT WASN'T
LIKE THAT AT ALL.
I HAVE A COUPLE
OF GREAT PARENTS.
I KEEP MEANING
TO WRITE. I OWE
THEM, BUT...



LIKE I CARE? YOU'RE NOT ANY FUN ANYMORE, UGLY.



HUPP FLOOR'S DRIPPING AWAY...



GOTCHA!



YOU'D BETTER WATCH YOURSELF, MYSTIQUE. NEXT TIME I MIGHT NOT BE SO FAST TO PULL YOU BACK FROM THE EDGE.

THIS TUNNEL IS A DEAD END. I'M PICKING UP A STRONG SCENT DOWN THERE THAT COULD BELONG TO THE BEAST, BUT WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY DOWN.



MAYBE NOT?



HOLD ON TO MOMMA, UGLY. YOU'RE IN FOR THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE.

M EANWHILE...

LOOKS LIKE THESE TUNNELS ARE RIGGED FOR INTRUDERS, FORGE.

BUT DON'T SWEAT IT.

THIS IS EXACTLY THE KIND OF THING YOU BROUGHT ME ALONG FOR... ISN'T IT?

OR WAS IT MY COLORFUL PERSONALITY?

CREED IS A CERTIFIABLE, SOCIOPATHIC, COLD-BLOODED KILLER.

THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT HE IS BIDDING HIS TIME UNTIL HE CAN OVERRIDE THE RESTRAINING COLLAR AND KILL US ALL.

HE EMBODIES EVERYTHING THAT'S DARK AND SINISTER IN X-FACTOR THESE PAST FEW MONTHS.

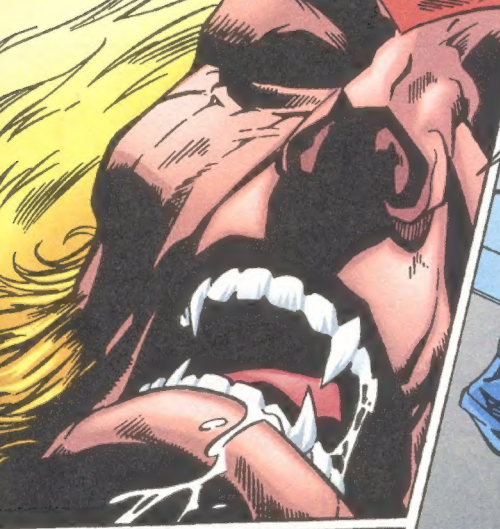
EVERYTHING THAT I DESPISE.

HEY! WHAT HAPPENED?

I KILLED THE POWER SOURCE.

I WAS JUST STARTING TO WORK UP A SWEAT... HAVE A LITTLE FUN... AND YOU WENT AND SPOILED IT.

LET'S KEEP MOVING.



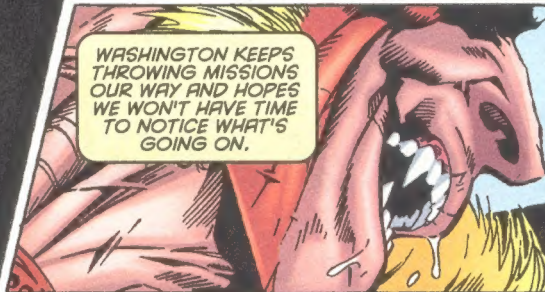
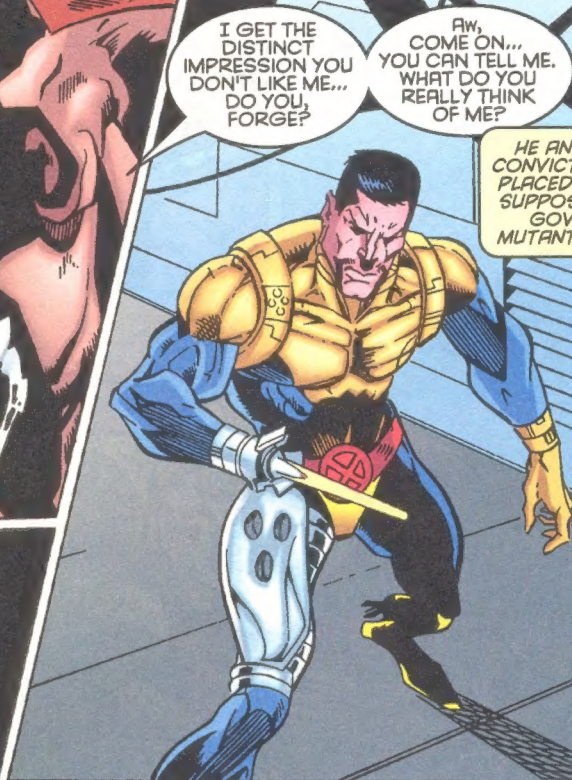
I GET THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION YOU DON'T LIKE ME... DO YOU, FORGE?

AW, COME ON... YOU CAN TELL ME. WHAT DO YOU REALLY THINK OF ME?

HE AND MYSTIQUE, CONVICTED CRIMINALS, PLACED WITH WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE GOVERNMENT'S MUTANT MILITIA, WHY?

COME ON, FORGE, YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO TALK SOONER OR LATER.

NO ONE IS GIVING ME ANSWERS.



WASHINGTON KEEPS THROWING MISSIONS OUR WAY AND HOPES WE WON'T HAVE TIME TO NOTICE WHAT'S GOING ON.

BUT I'M NOTICING.

NOTICING IT ALL.



WHAT WE'VE UNCOVERED ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTING THE HOUND PROGRAM DOES NOT BODE WELL FOR THE FUTURE OF MUTANTS.

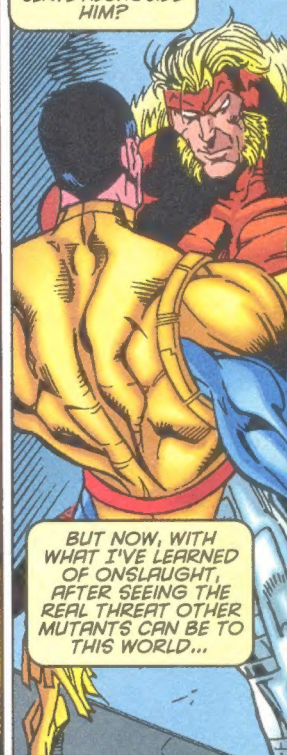
AND IT ALL COMES BACK TO SABRETOOTH.

IF IT WASN'T FOR THAT LAST STRAW I'D PROBABLY HAVE BEEN WILLING TO BE THE GOOD SOLDIER AND OBEY ORDERS JUST BECAUSE THEY CAME FROM UNCLE SAM, BUT...



... CREED HAD ME THINKING ABOUT LEAVING X-FACTOR.

HOW COULD I CONTINUE TO SERVE ALONGSIDE HIM?



BUT NOW, WITH WHAT I'VE LEARNED OF ONSLAUGHT, AFTER SEEING THE REAL THREAT OTHER MUTANTS CAN BE TO THIS WORLD...

... I'M NOT SURE THAT THE NEW DIRECTION OF X-FACTOR IS SUCH A BAD IDEA AFTER ALL.

MAYBE WE DO NEED TO START POLICING OUR OWN.

AND I'M CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO LEAVE THAT JOB TO A KILLER LIKE HIM.

HEY, FORGE, YOU HEAR THAT?

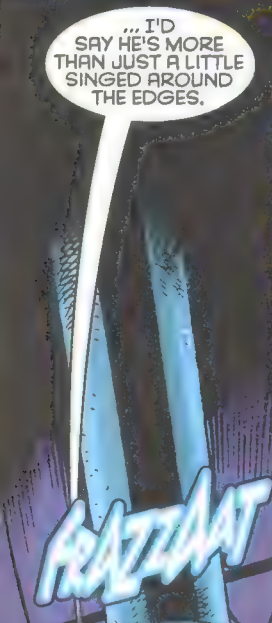
NO, BUT THE ENERGY READINGS I'M GETTING HERE ARE GOING OFF THE SCALE.

YEAH, I'M THINKIN' IT'S TIME FOR US TO LEAVE THESE TUNNELS AND GO... STRAIGHT... THROUGH...

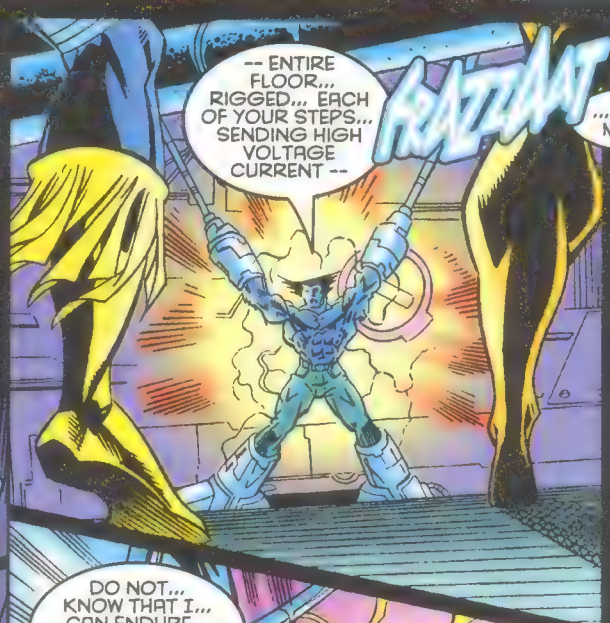




I'VE GOT YOUR BLUE-FURRED BUDDY'S SCENT, FORGE, BUT...



... I'D SAY HE'S MORE THAN JUST A LITTLE SINGED AROUND THE EDGES.



-- ENTIRE FLOOR... RIGGED... EACH OF YOUR STEPS... SENDING HIGH VOLTAGE CURRENT --



... THROUGH MY BODY!

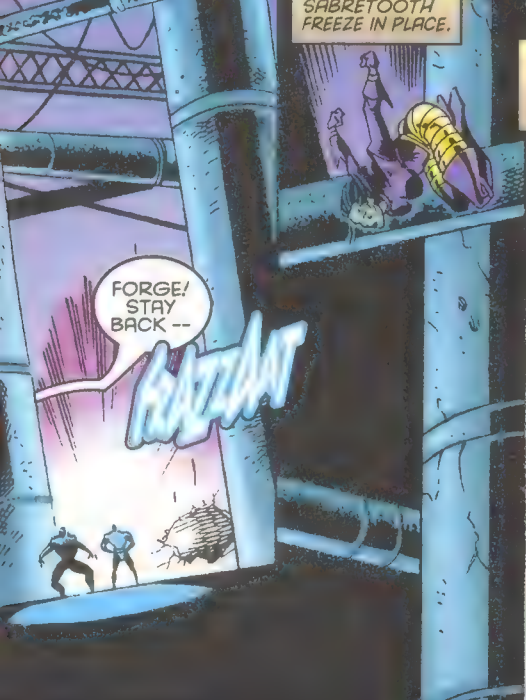


DO NOT... KNOW THAT I... CAN ENDURE... MUCH... LONGER... MUST... BE... FREED.

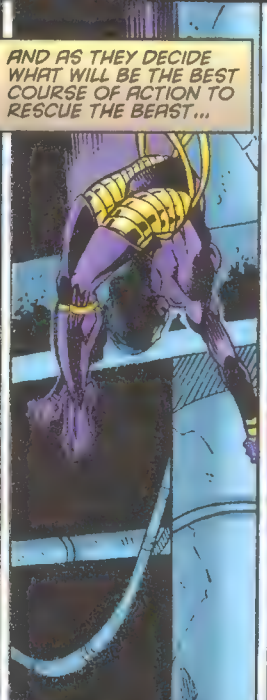
FORGE AND SABRETOOTH FREEZE IN PLACE.

AND AS THEY DECIDE WHAT WILL BE THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION TO RESCUE THE BEAST...

... A SHADOW SEPARATES FROM THE RAFTERS ABOVE.



FORGE! STAY BACK --



SILENTLY, ACROBATICALLY, DROPPING TOWARD THEM UNTIL...

... FATALE, MUTANT ASSASSIN, STANDS READY TO KILL.

I WAS HOPING I'D GET THIS CHANCE, CREED.

I OWE YOU.

SURE YOU DO, FRAIL. NOW YOU COME AND SEE IF YOU CAN DO ANY WORSE THAN YOU DID IN BANGKOK.

MAN, SABLE, IS THERE ANYONE WHO DOESN'T HAVE A GRUDGE AGAINST YOU FOR SOME PAST THING?

WILDCHILD? MYSTIQUE?

YEAH, PRETTY COOL, HUH?

WHO KNEW OL' RAVEN HAD IT IN HER?

CHECK IT OUT, FATALE. IT'S A BIRD! IT'S A PLANE! IT'S... IT'S...

IT'S MY FOOT!

VERY CLEVER, MYSTIQUE. YOUR INHIBITOR IMPLANT HINDERS YOU FROM TAKING THE FORM OF ANY CURRENT X-MAN, BUT YOU'VE MORPHED INTO ARCHANGEL'S OLD WINGS WHICH WERE NEVER DOWNLOADED.

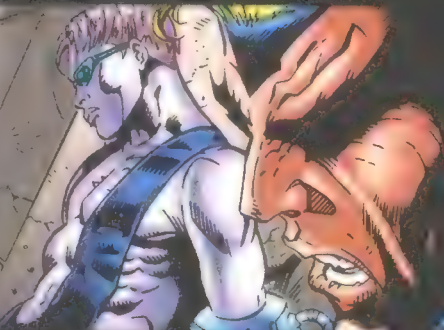
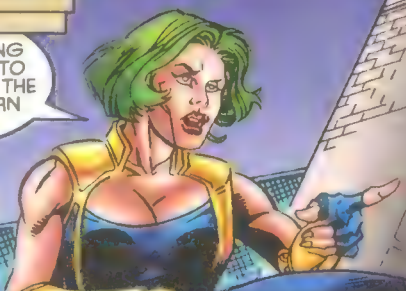
THIS IS A SIDE OF YOUR POWERS I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, RAVEN. I AM IMPRESSED.

EXCUSE ME!

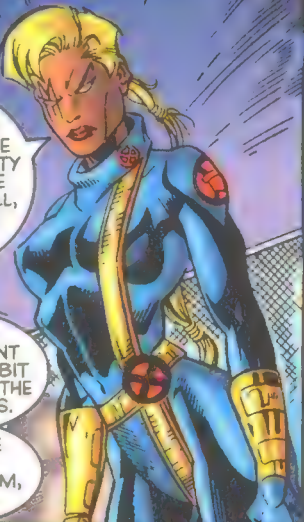
BUT IF YOU WOULD BE SO KIND, MY GENETICALLY GIFTED FELLOWS, I AM IN NEED OF YOUR AID.

MEANWHILE...

CAN'T BRING YOURSELF TO LOOK ME IN THE EYES -- CAN YOU?

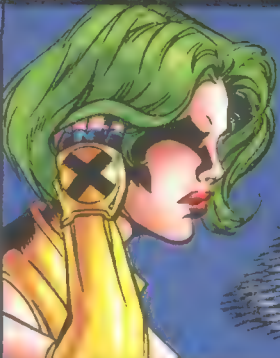


UH, POLARIS, I KNOW YOU'VE GOT SENIORITY IN THIS TIME PERIOD AND ALL, BUT, I WAS THINKING --

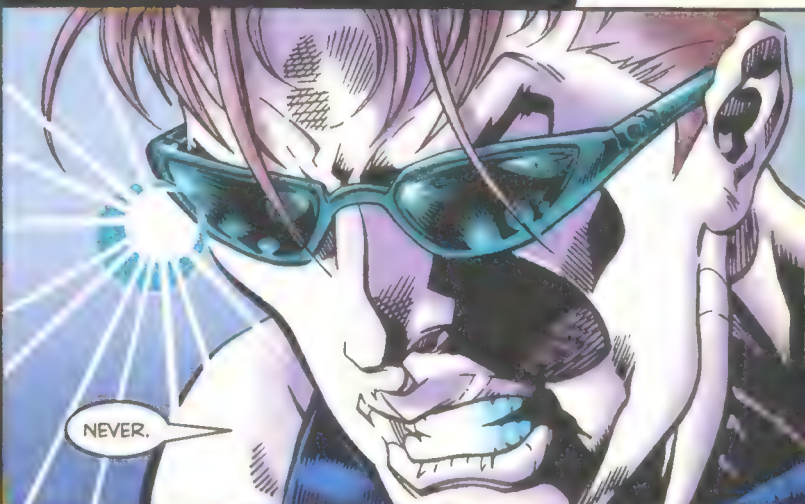
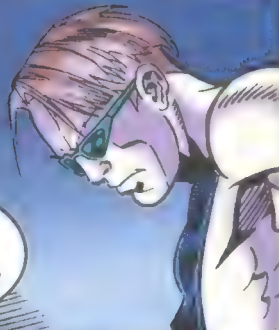


-- YOU MIGHT WANT TO MOVE A BIT AWAY FROM THE PRISONERS.

I'M FINE RIGHT WHERE I AM, SHARD.



YOU WOULDN'T HURT ME... WOULD YOU, RANDOM?



NEVER.



THAT IS... NO MORE THAN YOU ALREADY HAVE!

I NEVER WANTED TO DO THIS... ANY OF THIS... NOT TO YOU.

BUT McCOY... HE'S THE ONLY PERSON WHO HAS EVER TAKEN CARE OF ME.

FOR AS LONG AS I REMEMBER, HE'S BEEN WORKING TO HELP ME CONTROL MY MUTANT POWERS... TO GIVE ME A CHANCE AT NORMALCY.

WITHOUT HIM I WOULD BE NOTHING MORE THAN A PILE OF FORMLESS GUNK.

HE HELPED CREATE THE RANDOM IDENTITY, GAVE ME A LIFE. AND I REALLY DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING HE ASKED ME TO DO WAS SO BAD.

MAYBE I WAS STUPID TO HAVE TRUSTED HIM, BUT HE'S THE CLOSEST THING TO A FATHER I'VE EVER KNOWN. I REALLY HAD NO CHOICE IN THIS AT ALL.

BUT THAT'S THE THING WITH McCOY. HE NEVER MAKES YOU DO ANYTHING YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO.

THAT'S WHY YOU'VE GOT TO WATCH IT WITH ALEX, LORNA.

SURE McCOY PLAYED AROUND WITH HIS HEAD A LITTLE BIT, BUT NONE OF IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN UNLESS HE'D KEYED INTO SOMETHING THAT WAS ALREADY THERE.

BE CAREFUL -- DESPITE EVERYTHING -- DESPITE WHAT HAS HAPPENED -- DESPITE WHAT YOU THINK -- I STILL DON'T WANT YOU TO BE HURT.

I'D RATHER DIE.

I LOVE YOU, LORNA. ALWAYS HAVE.

LOVE?

SPARE ME.

I FEEL SORRY FOR YOU -- FOR ALL THAT McCOY'S DONE TO YOU, BUT...

... I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO US.

WHAT ABOUT ME?

INSIDE...

IT'S AS IF
A PROLONGED
AND BALEFUL
NIGHTMARE HAS
FINALLY COME
TO AN END,
FORGE.

FOR THIS
I WILL BE
ETERNALLY
IN YOUR
DEBT.

ALL
PASSAGE OF TIME
IS BUT A BLUR BROKEN
ONLY BY THE INTERMITTENT
APPEARANCES OF THE IMPOSTER
AS HE INFLECTED NEW, AND MORE
DEVIOUS, TORTURES
UPON ME.

NOW
THE NIGHTMARE
HAS ENDED AND I
AM ONCE AGAIN
FREE.

FREE TO
JOIN MY FELLOW
X-MEN IN THE
BATTLE AGAINST
ONSLAUGHT.

WITH
YOUR PERMISSION,
FORGE, I WOULD
JOIN THEM IN ALL
DUE HASTE.

LEST THE
CHARLATAN
ONCE MORE
INSINUATES HIMSELF
AMONGST MY
COMRADES.

HOLD IT
RIGHT THERE...
MCCOY!





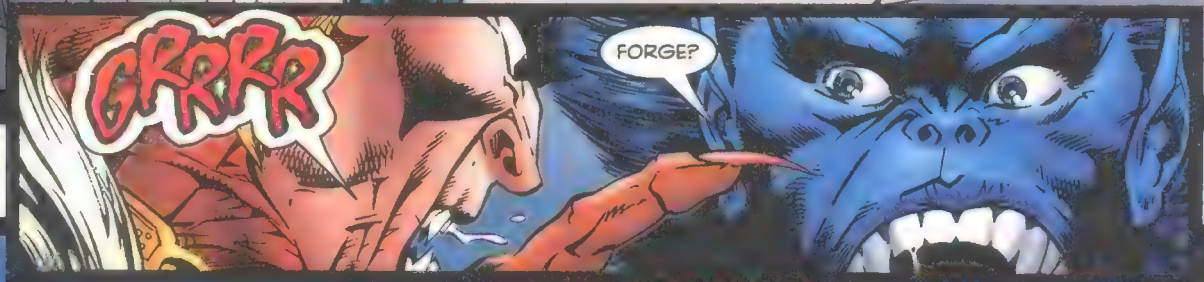
YES,
WHAT IS IT,
CREED?

~SNIFF~
~SNIFF~

I DON'T
LIKE THE SMELL
OF ANY OF
THIS.

GRRRR

AND I
DON'T LIKE THE
SMELL OF
YOU!



GRRRR

FORGE?



NOT
ANOTHER STEP,
SABRETOOTH! I
DON'T KNOW WHY
YOUR RESTRAINING
COLLAR IS MAL-
FUNCTIONING,
BUT ...

... BACK
OFF, OR
WE DROP YOU
WHERE YOU
STAND.

MAYBE
THE COLLAR
AIN'T BROKEN,
FORGE.
THINK ABOUT
THAT!



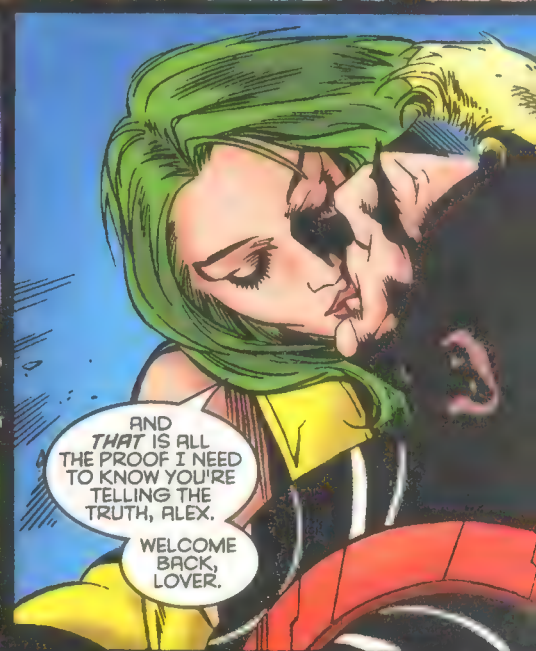
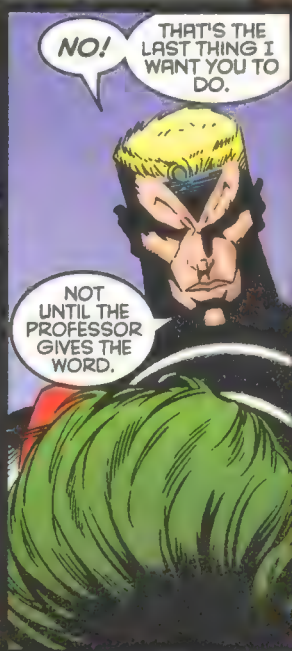
NO!



WILDCHILD!
WHAT ARE YOU
DOING?

GET OUT
OF THERE...
NOW!

NO!
SABRETOOTH
IS RIGHT!







THAT IS SWEET, RANDOM. BUT DID YOU THINK LORNA WOULD FALL FOR THE HERO BIT?

PUSHING YOUR POWERS TO THE LIMIT. BREAKING FREE -- JUST TO IMPRESS THE GIRL, HUH?

YOU'VE FORGOTTEN THAT YOU AREN'T THE ONLY ONE WITH POWERS, KID.

McCOY BOOSTED MINE AS WELL.



SO HOW'S ABOUT YOU AND I FINISH OFF WHAT WE STARTED DOWN IN VIRGINIA?

I OWE YOU FOR TURNING ME OVER TO McCOY.

THOUGH IN SOME WAYS YOU DID ME A FAVOR. McCOY DID HELP TO OPEN MY EYES. HELPED ME TO SEE WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT.

ANYWAY... IT'S PAYBACK TIME.



WHAT'S HAPPENING?!

MY MUTANT POWER TO RANDOMLY DEFLECT ANY MUTANT POWERS THROWN AT ME ISN'T WORKING.

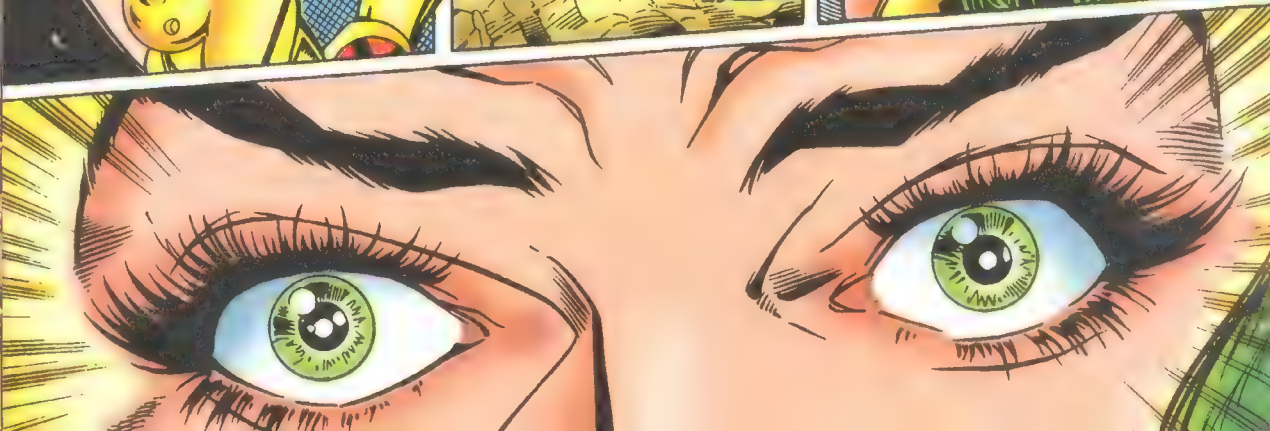
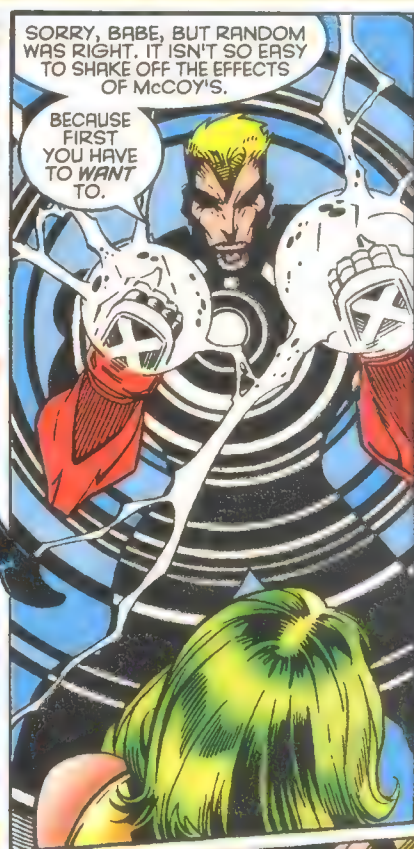
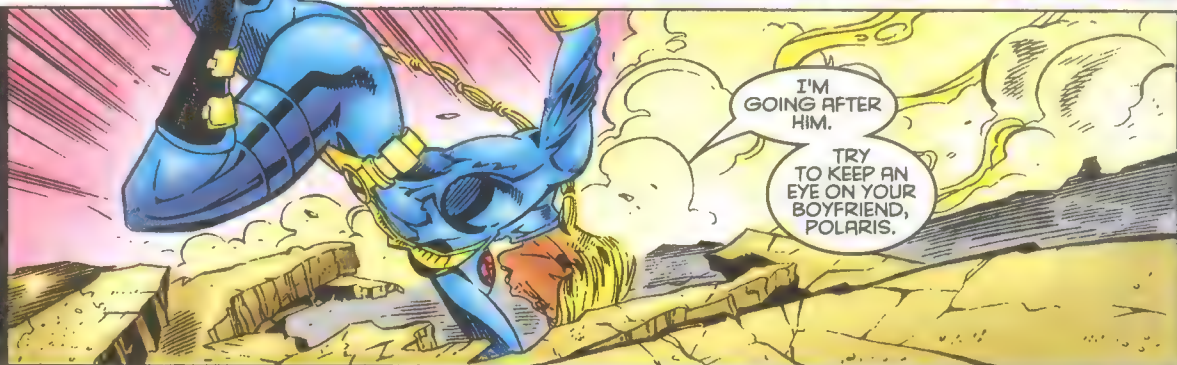
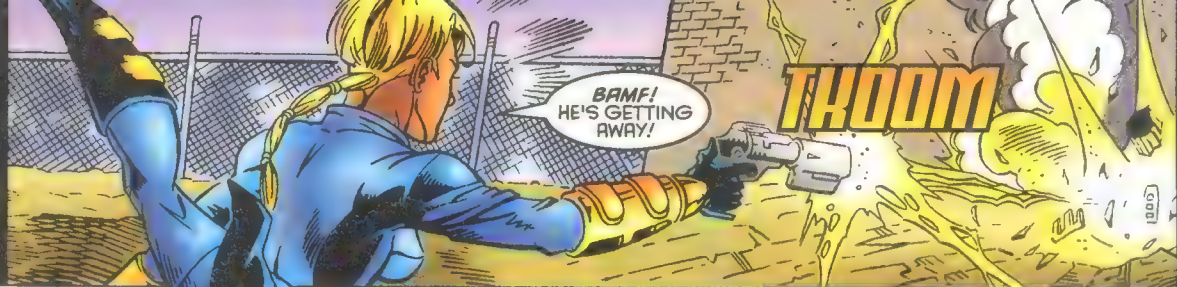
THE HEAT... TOO INTENSE...

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?!

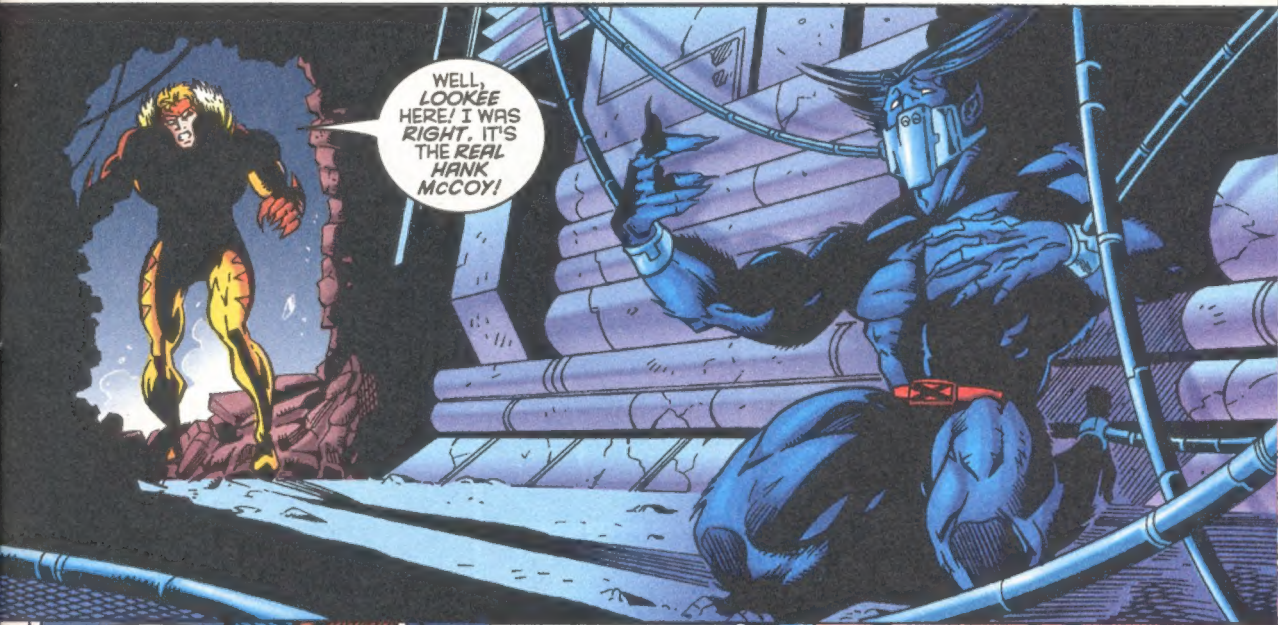
McCOY!

HELLUP
MEEEE









WELL,
LOOKÉE
HERE! I WAS
RIGHT. IT'S
THE REAL
HANK
MCCOY!



~KAFF~
CREED ~KOFF~
I NEVER THOUGHT
YOU'D BE COMING
TO MY RESCUE, BUT...
YOU HAVE MY
GRATITUDE.



IN A LAST ATTEMPT TO
SUPERSEDE ME, THE
IMPOSTER FINALLY
HOPED TO CAUSE MY
DEMISE BY CUTTING
OFF MY OXYGEN
SUPPLY.



WHY
ARE YOU
LOOKING
AT ME LIKE
THAT?

FORGE?



CAN
YOU NOT SEE
THROUGH SUCH
A SIMPLISTIC
DECEPTION?

NO...
I GUESS
I CAN'T, BUT
SABRETOOTH
CAN!

STARS
AND GARTERS,
MAN! USE THE
BRAIN WITH WHICH
YOU WERE BLESSED!
I'M THE REAL
MCCOY, HE'S THE
IMPOSTER!



STARS
AND
GARTERS --
INDEED!

YOU
MAY
KIDNAP
ME.

YOU MAY
BAMBOOZLE
MY FRIENDS.

YOU
MAY EVEN
TRY TO
KILL ME,
BUT...

... WHEN
YOU **STEAL**
AN IDIOM WHICH
I WORKED SO
HARD TO
COIN...

... YOU
HAVE
STEPPED
WAY
OVER THE
LINE!

IF THAT
DOESN'T
PROVE I'M
THE GENUINE
BEAST...

... MAYBE
THIS
WILL!

FWAM

WELL, MY
FRIENDS...

... DOES
ANYONE
WANT TO
TELL ME
WHAT I'VE
MISSED?

SHORT TIME
LATER...

I CAN'T BELIEVE
THIS IS HAPPENING. I
LEFT HER ALONE WITH
HAVOK FOR ONLY
A SECOND.

HE TRICKED
US BOTH. AFTER
ALL MY TIME AS A
COMMANDING
OFFICER IN THE XSE,
I SHOULD HAVE
SEEN THIS COMING.

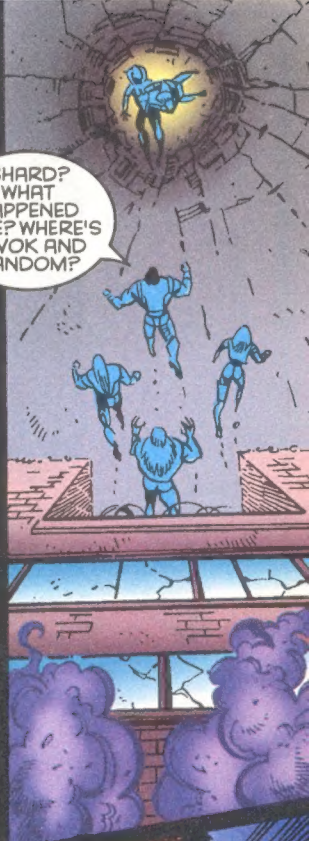
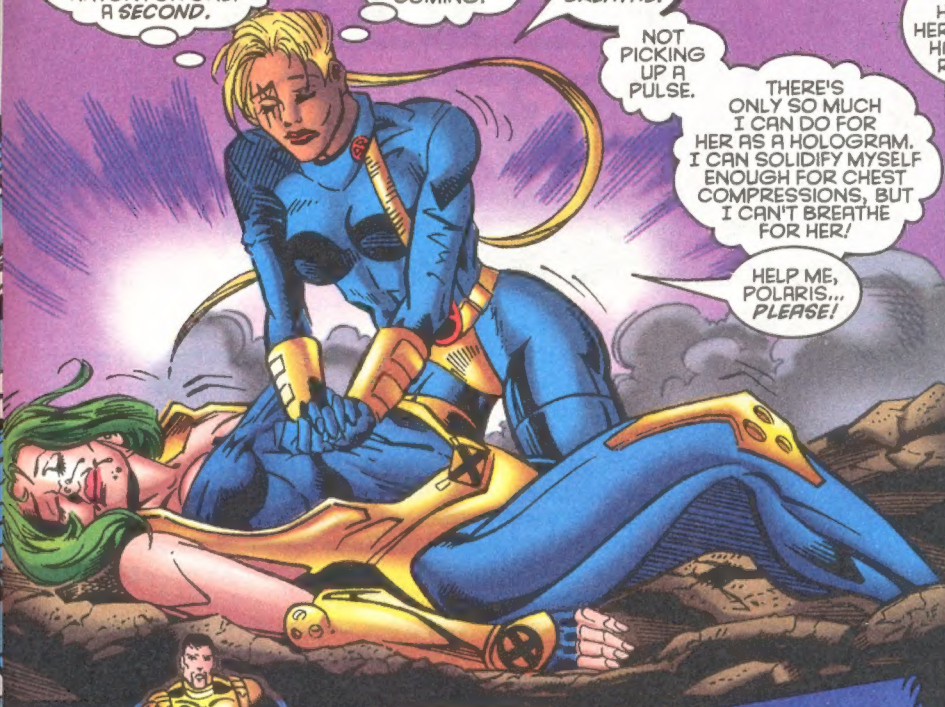
C'MON,
FIGHT,
POLARIS!
BREATHE!

NOT
PICKING
UP A
PULSE.

THERE'S
ONLY SO MUCH
I CAN DO FOR
HER AS A HOLOGRAM.
I CAN SOLIDIFY MYSELF
ENOUGH FOR CHEST
COMPRESSIONS, BUT
I CAN'T BREATHE
FOR HER!

HELP ME,
POLARIS...
PLEASE!

SHARD?
WHAT
HAPPENED
HERE? WHERE'S
HAVOK AND
RANDOM?



THEY'RE
GONE! AND
LORNA WILL
BE, TOO, IF
WE DON'T GET
HER TO A
HOSPITAL
FAST!

FATALE,
YOU'RE GOING
TO TELEPORT US
TO THE NEAREST
HOSPITAL
NOW.



SHALL I,
MCWOY? OR
DO WE MAKE
OUR ESCAPE
WHEN THEY
UNSHACKLE
MEP?

NO,
NO, DEAR
FATALE.

LET'S
HELP THEM
IN THEIR LITTLE
QUANDARY.
WE'LL SAVE
POLARIS.

THEY
WILL FOREVER
BE INDEBTED
TO US.

AND
WE'LL BIDE OUR
TIME AS THEIR
PRISONERS.

AFTER
ALL, TIME IS
ON OUR SIDE.
THIS IS EXACTLY
WHERE I WANT
US TO BE.

